

LIVING TOGETHER, LIVING ALONE:

Households, Families, Marital Status, and Living Arrangements, 1998

The great variety of living arrangements that adults choose makes it no longer possible to point to the “typical” American household.

Many businesses are concerned about living arrangements because household composition influences purchasing behavior and service delivery. State and local governments pay attention to households when making decisions about everything from traffic patterns to neighborhood watch programs.

A substantial share of adults live alone, but the majority live with their spouses. Some live with grandparents,

parents, aunts, uncles, sisters, brothers, and other relatives, but some live with people who are not related to them by blood or marriage. However, living arrangements take on even greater significance when children are involved. For instance, the definition of poverty is based on income thresholds that vary by size of family and number of children.

Families dominate American households, but less so today than they did in 1980.

In 1980, families represented 74 percent of all households. By 1998, only 69 percent of America’s 102 million households were families — and not all families

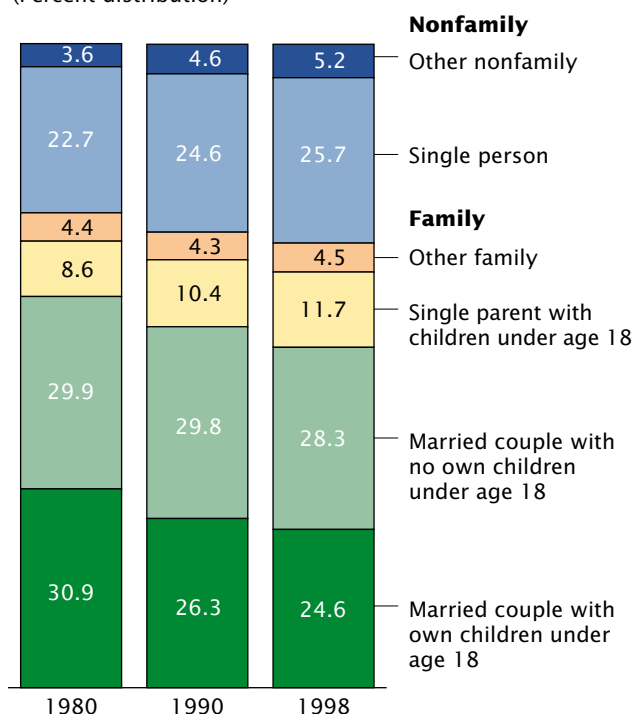
Words That Count

- A **household** consists of all the people who occupy a housing unit, regardless of their relationship. A **family household** has at least two members related by blood, marriage, or adoption, one of whom is related to the householder. A **nonfamily household** can either be a person living alone or a householder who shares the home with nonrelatives only — for example, boarders or roommates.
- **Householder** refers to the person (or one of the people) in whose name a housing unit is owned, rented, or maintained. If the house is owned or rented jointly by a married couple, the householder may be either the husband or the wife.
- **Marital status** includes the following categories: never married, married, separated, widowed, and divorced. For the purpose of this report, the term “unmarried” includes never-married, widowed, divorced, and separated people.

Figure 5-1.

Households by Household Type: 1980, 1990, and 1998

(Percent distribution)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1980 and 1990 censuses and Current Population Survey, March 1998.

consisted of children living with both their parents. In fact, fewer than half of all family households were composed of children under age 18 living with at least one parent, according to the 1998 Current Population Survey (CPS). Single parents accounted for about 27 percent of all families with children.

Even though married-couples represented more than half of all households, they were more than three-quarters of all family households in 1998. However, just 25 million of the 54 million married-couple families contained at least one child under 18 years old.¹ When children aged 18 and older were taken into account along with younger children, about 31 million of these couples lived with a son or daughter. Almost 11 million married-couple families had a member aged 65 or older. Both an older household member and a child under age 18 were present in about a half million married-couple families.

Married adults are still a majority of Americans aged 15 and older.

Of the 209 million people in this age group, 56 percent were married and living with their spouses, according to the 1998 CPS. However, the age when people first marry had risen over the previous two decades. In 1980, the median age of first marriage was 22 for women and 25 for men. By 1998, the median age of first marriage had risen to 25 for women and 27 for men. Fully 48 percent of women and 59 percent of men aged 18 to 24 were either living with their parents or in a college dormitory in 1998.

In 1998, unmarried adults accounted for 44 percent of all adults aged 15 and older, up from 39 percent in 1980.

In 1998, 91 million Americans aged 15 and older were not married. The largest share of unmarried adults, about 64 percent, had never been married. Another 21 percent were divorced and 15 percent were widowed. Women represented 81 percent of widowed adults. Nearly half (45 percent) of women aged 65 and older were widowed and 7 out of 10 of these women lived alone.

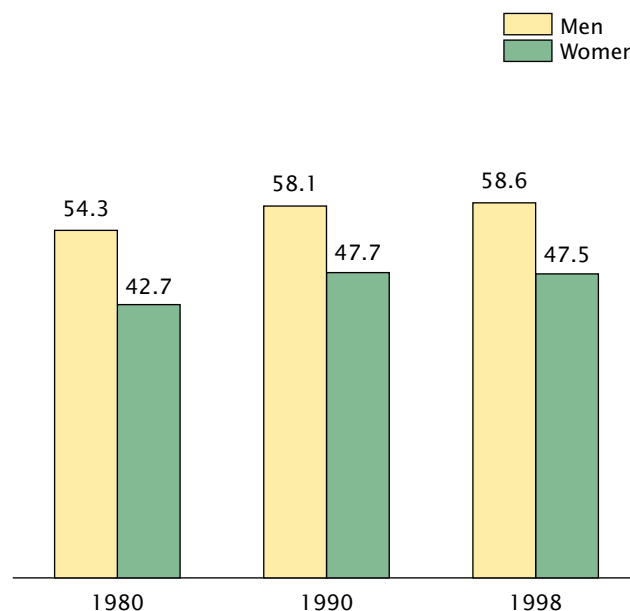
In 1998, people living alone accounted for 83 percent of America's 32 million nonfamily households. Men represented 61 percent of householders under age 45 who lived alone, but women were 68 percent of householders over age 45 who lived alone. Among the

population aged 65 and older, more than three times as many women as men lived alone.

Figure 5-2.

Men and Women Aged 18 to 24 Living With One or Both Parents or in a College Dormitory: 1980, 1990, and 1998

(Percent of men and women aged 18 to 24)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 1980 and 1990 censuses, and Current Population Survey, March 1998.

The Census Bureau Can Tell You More

- For more detailed information, consult the following U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Report: *Household and Family Characteristics: March 1998 (Update)* by Lynne M. Casper and Ken Bryson.
- Look for complete reports and detailed tables on the Census Bureau's World Wide Web site (www.census.gov). Click on "H" and select "Households" or "M" and select "Marital status."
- Contact the Fertility and Family Statistics Branch of the U.S. Census Bureau at 301-457-2465 or e-mail pop@census.gov.
- For information on publications and other resources, see Appendix A.

¹ See the definition for "own" children in Chapter 6.